

Steal This Hook! Old Mysteries

By Robert Wiese



Welcome to the new Steal This Hook! I am very glad to add my contributions to this column. One of my favorite **D&D** products ever produced was the *Dungeon Master Design Kit*, a veritable cornucopia of general ideas for rolling up adventure ideas randomly. So, adventure ideas are close to my heart, and I am glad to help DMs out there. I wish this resource was available back in the day when I ran home campaigns.

The column has been revamped and expanded a little. The revamping comes in the formats of the hooks. As you'll see, there are optional secret motivations suggested for the NPCs and different complications that you can throw into the adventure you design around the hook. (Remember to allow for appropriate checks; sometimes a person with bad intentions may give herself away!) It has been expanded into other campaign worlds as well, especially the **Forgotten Realms**. Each entry has a campaign adaptation sidebar for the **Forgotten Realms**, **Eberron**, a generic **D&D** setting, and even the **d20 Modern** setting. So, off we go. This month's theme is "old mysteries," or things from the past that thrust their way into the present.

Lady of the Lake -- *Eberron*

The Last War produced many casualties, not a few of them innocents. When Breland made its military push across Silver Lake and into what was then Aundair (now the Eldeen Reaches), a large number of farms were burned and small towns and villages destroyed. A few of these towns fended off the destructive Brelish by offering supplies, haven, or even the "services" of local women and men. In one of the villages near Greenblade, a local woman named Bristarra disappeared without a trace in early 955 YK. Bristarra was a beautiful girl training in the healing arts, and her whole village loved her. At the time, people blamed the Brelish and mourned her loss, but the outrage contributed even more to the growing desire to evict the Brelish military from the region.



Now, troubling reports are circulating that people have seen Bristarra walking on the surface of Silver Lake. Ship captains have reported that either themselves or their crewpeople have seen a woman strolling serenely on the lake's water. Fisherpeople have reported seeing the same woman in the early dawn hours dancing on the waters. At night, she has been seen from the shore on the Eldeen Reaches side of the lake. She is growing into something of a local legend, though no one has ever gotten close enough to determine if she is a real woman, a spirit, or an elaborate illusion. Her father, Crennilius, is close to death and wants to know. He hires the adventurers to find this apparition and learn the truth about what happened to his daughter. Time is running out, though, because he could die any day now.

d100 Motivations

01-50 All is as it seems. Crennilius really wants to know what happened to his daughter.

51-80 Crennilius knows what happened to his daughter. He sold her to a Brelish captain, who discarded her when he was finished with her. Crennilius wants to know if this is really his daughter, because he doesn't want anyone to find out about his dark deed.

81-00 Crennilius is afraid that his daughter has returned as an undead of some kind, something that she would never have wanted. He wants the adventurers to destroy her, but cannot bring himself to ask.

d100 Complications

01-30 Bristarra is a ghost caught between her good nature and a desire for revenge for how she died. The conflict within her explains why she has not attacked anyone yet. But soon she will.

31-55 A great monster lives under the surface of the lake. It lurks near the apparition hoping for some prey from among those who come to investigate.

56-75 Someone is using this local tragedy in a political ploy to stir up unrest between the inhabitants on each side of Silver Lake. He wants a war to break out here that will end the Thronehold peace.

76-00 Pirates are using the image of this girl as a mermaid of sorts, to lure ships to where they can be attacked. It should be noted that only ships that have not approached the apparition have been able to tell stories about it.

Gold in the Hills -- *Forgotten Realms*

The ancient dwarven kingdom of Tethyamar once spanned the Desertsouth Mountains on the western edge of Daggerdale. Several hundred years ago it fell to armies of monsters. About the same time that these armies began to threaten the dwarves, the king abandoned a few of the lesser mines on the Daggerdale side of the mountains because they were deemed to be completely worked out. Several persistent dwarves tried to get a little more, but even they gave up eventually. Through the next few hundred years, prospectors and adventurers that braved the monsters found that indeed these mines were empty of anything of value, and it became settled fact that the mines were worthless.

Campaign Adaptation

Here are some suggestions for different campaign worlds. To make things more interesting on the waters of the lake, you might consider using material from [Stormwrack](#); for particularly difficult encounters, you might consider stocking the lake with drowned (*Monster Manual III*, pg. 46) -- considered by many a DM as very deadly undead.

Forgotten Realms: Set it on the shores of the Sea of Fallen Stars, and change the Brelish military to pirates.

Eberron: Set it in and around Silver Lake, as written.

Generic: Use any lake large enough to have opposing military forces on both sides.

d20 Modern: Set this adventure on a lake in Scotland or Ireland, and use the British as the opposing military force.



Within the last year, gold has started trickling out of one of the mines. The amounts have been steadily growing, as if the supply is actually replenishing itself. People are interested in what is happening in the old mine, and any of several people could hire adventurers to find out.

d100 Employers and Motivations

01-25 Though the last king of Tethyamar died in 1369 DR, he had sons. One of these, Tasster, also called Fiendshredder, would like to claim the gold and use it to finance an effort to reclaim Tethyamar.

25-50 Residents of Daggerdale are very interested in this new source of wealth, and want their share. Some of them hire the adventurers to stake a claim on their behalf and clear the way to the mine of dangerous monsters.

51-75 A scholar from Waterdeep has heard about the gold coming out of the abandoned mine, and he has come to the region to investigate. He wants protection and some help with the mystery, and he is willing to share whatever is found as a result of the quest.

76-00 Most people who go to the mine do not return for one reason or another. One of the adventurers has a relative that has gone missing while searching for, or in, the mine.

d100 Complications

01-25 A mindbender wizard ([Complete Arcane](#)) is using magic to fill the mine with gold because gold attracts other creatures. He wants to enslave these creatures, who will be mentally weakened by greed, and create an army to march against Daggerdale.

26-65 Through a connection to the Underdark, some duergar have discovered the gold as well, and want it for themselves.

66-85 The gold is the work of Bane, or priests of Bane from the Zhentarm, who seek to destabilize the Dalelands with a sudden influx of wealth. The resultant chaos would allow the Zhentarm to take over trade or take over the region.

86-00 The gold is natural and comes from a vein that a minor earthquake opened up. However, a mind flayer now occupies the mine and does not like all the company. He has been leaking out the gold through slaves, unaware of the history of the mine.

Campaign Adaptation

Here are some suggestions for different campaign worlds. To flesh out the dwarven angle, you might find [Races of Stone](#) useful.

Forgotten Realms: Set it in the Desertsouth Mountains, as written.

Eberron: Set it in the Ironroot Mountains, in the Mror Holds. You'll have to tweak the backstory a bit.

Generic: Set it in any mountain range that could once have had a mine. The miners need not have been dwarves.

d20 Modern: Set it in the Ural Mountains in Russia. Whether you want dwarves in Russia is up to you.

Necropolis in the Sands -- *Forgotten Realms*

As the player characters are crossing the Calim Desert from Memnon to Calimport, they come across a family searching frantically for a lost child. The family's wagon broke a wheel here this morning, and the three adults (a man, his wife, and her brother) cannibalized some other wood to make repairs while the



three children played nearby. The youngest child, eight-year-old Justinal, separated from the other two children and wandered off unnoticed. Everyone has been searching frantically for over an hour without success. The family asks the player characters to assist in the search. From the last location that Justinal was seen, any tracker that can make a DC 15 Survival check can find and follow Justinal's tracks. The difficulty is higher because a wind has erased some of the tracks in the hours since Justinal wandered off. His trail leads to a large and apparently deserted city about two hours' walk away. As the heroes reach the city gates themselves, darkness begins to fall.



The Calim Desert is rumored to have several ruined cities within its sands, and this is one of them. The residents were all killed during the genie wars of centuries ago, and they have since become undead of different kinds. A lich has moved in and taken control of things. In short, the city is a necropolis, and many undead await within to feast on the bodies and souls of any intruders.

The family has no wealth to offer the heroes; they are poor travelers escaping persecution in Calimport.

d100 Motivation

01-25 The family is setting a trap to lure the living into the necropolis so that undead can feed. Justinal is a zombie ordered to walk back toward the city to create a trail that can be followed. One of the adults is currently being possessed by a servant of the lich.

26-75 Everything is as it appears. The parents are careless and expected one of the other children to keep track of the younger ones.

76-00 There is no Justinal. The parents want brave heroes to go into the necropolis and bring out its treasures. The parents then plan to waylay the weakened player characters and take the loot. The other children are slaves of the parents and obey out of fear.

d100 Complications

01-30 No complications.

31-55 A lich has cast a spell on Justinal and called him to come to the city. The lich plans to make Justinal his apprentice and train him in the ways of evil from an early age.

56-75 Justinal is actually a child of an important noble in Calimport, and he was kidnapped by this group. If he is returned safely, then the player characters may gain great reward or may be accused of kidnapping him in the first place.

76-00 A rival lich or vampire sees in Justinal a chance to usurp the power of the lich. The player characters are caught in the middle as both sides try to use the child to their advantage and to the other's ruin.

Campaign Adaptation

Here are some suggestions for different campaign worlds. To develop (dare I say "flesh out?") the lich or other undead, and the necropolis itself, you might consider [Libris Mortis](#) or [Heroes of Horror](#) as useful sources. [Sandstorm](#) has good material for bringing the desert setting to life.

Forgotten Realms: Set it in the Calim Desert, as written

Eberron: Set it in the Blade Desert in Valenar's territory, close to the border with the Mournland.

Generic: Use a desert setting where a city could have been lost in the sands. It should be several days' travel from any major city.

d20 Modern: This adventure is suitable for a location in southern Egypt or the northern Sudan.

About the Author

Robert Wiese entered the gaming hobby through the Boy Scouts and progressed from green recruit to head of the most powerful gaming fan organization in the world. He served as head of the RPGA Network for almost seven years, overseeing the creation of the **Living Greyhawk** and **Living Force** campaigns, among other achievements. Eventually, he returned to private life in Reno, Nevada, where he spends as much time as possible with his wife, new son Owen, and many pets.

He is still involved in writing, organizing conventions, and playing, and he models proteins for the Biochemistry Department of the University of Nevada, Reno.

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